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Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Summary record of the 1st meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 12 February 2003, at 11.30 a.m.

Temporary Chairman: Mr. Annan (Secretary-General)
Chairman: Mr. Huntley ..... (Saint Lucia)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.50 a.m.

Opening of the session by the Secretary-General

1. **The Temporary Chairman** said that he was pleased to be opening the 2003 session of the Special Committee, which had before it an important agenda. In 2002, the Organization had had the satisfaction of seeing Timor-Leste, a former Non-Self Governing Territory, become a member of the United Nations as a sovereign nation; for many years before that, the Special Committee had given the East Timorese an international forum in which to express their aspirations.

2. As the Special Committee embarked on its current session, it would continue to base its work on the United Nations Charter and General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV), containing the Declaration on Decolonization. As those documents established, Non-Self Governing Territories were able to exercise a full measure of self-government through one of three options: free association, integration with another State, or independence. It was essential that that choice should be based on the freely expressed wishes of the peoples of the Territories. He hoped that the Special Committee would continue to seek appropriate arrangements for the remaining 16 Non-Self Governing Territories at its current session.

3. In that connection, productive cooperation between the Special Committee and the administering Powers was important. At the inception of the United Nations, the administering Powers, under the Charter of the Organization, had committed themselves to bringing the Territories under their administration to an appropriate level of self-government. It had been the Special Committee's main goal, since its creation, to assist and expedite that process.

4. Many of the remaining 16 Non-Self Governing Territories had made progress towards self-government by developing their constitutional, political and economic systems. In recent years, the Special Committee had endeavoured to engage the administering Powers in a transparent and creative dialogue on the future of the Territories, whose circumstances and characteristics were all unique. It had sought to establish case-by-case programmes of work, with the full participation of the peoples of the Territories, to promote their political, economic and social development and to determine the status of each Territory in the context of decolonization.

5. He was pleased to note that progress had been made in establishing a programme of work for Tokelau, and that the Government of New Zealand and the people of the Territory had provided full cooperation to the United Nations mission that had visited Tokelau in August 2002.

6. He called on all the administering Powers and the Special Committee to work together to seek innovative and practical ways to reinvigorate the decolonization process so that the United Nations could close an unfinished chapter in history. He stood ready to provide any necessary support and assistance which that undertaking might require. In that spirit, he wished the Special Committee every success in the year ahead.

Adoption of the agenda

7. The agenda was adopted.

Election of officers

8. *Mr. Huntley (Saint Lucia) was elected Chairman, Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoué (Côte d'Ivoire) and Mr. Rodriguez Parrilla (Cuba) were elected Vice-Chairmen, and Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) was elected Rapporteur, by acclamation.*

9. *Mr. Huntley (Saint Lucia) took the Chair.*

10. **The Chairman** said that the presence of the Secretary-General was evidence that the most senior members of the Secretariat considered the work of the Special Committee to be relevant and not in danger of being swept aside for budgetary reasons.

11. In reaffirming the inalienable human right of peoples to self-determination, the Millennium Declaration had signalled that colonialism still existed and that it deserved the continued attention of the international community. Colonialism had not disappeared, as some asserted, it had simply taken on new forms. As a result, there was an illusion of self-government: even people in Non-Self Governing Territories sometimes believed that it was legitimate for a larger country to exercise unilateral authority over them, even though they were unable to influence it politically. Fortunately, long-standing General Assembly resolutions and human rights conventions did not consider such authority to be legitimate.

12. The Special Committee had historically acted as a channel for the United Nations to help the peoples of Non-Self Governing Territories to determine their political future without external interference. It was the main forum for the peoples of those Territories to make their views on their situation known to the international community, inter alia, through the regional seminars in the Caribbean and the Pacific, which gave rise to important recommendations, as did the increasingly targeted resolutions of the General Assembly.

13. However, the Special Committee would be trapped in a cycle of formulating recommendations, drafting resolutions and hearing petitions unless it accelerated its efforts and was more focused on results. Its purpose was to remove territories from the list of Non-Self Governing Territories, and it should aim to trigger an automatic decolonization process for each of the 16 remaining such Territories within the next decade.

14. The Special Committee had adopted the practice of developing work programmes for each Territory, with the aim of being more proactive. However, it needed to go one step further. There was no reason for those work programmes to be dealt with one by one: they could be developed and implemented in parallel. He proposed to establish working groups to devise such programmes for individual Territories or groups of Territories, and to facilitate that effort by having the seminar in the Caribbean in 2003 focus on the way forward for the non-independent Territories of that region.

15. Since the proposed working groups would be made up of members of the Special Committee, he needed their support. The members of the Special Committee needed to overcome any fear of change, however radical: decolonization by definition meant change. The Special Committee also needed the support and cooperation of the administering Powers, as without them, the decolonization process could not be successful, meaningful and peaceful. They should not see a more active Special Committee as an adversary, but as a partner which enabled them to discharge a responsibility which they all had as members of the United Nations. New Zealand's excellent cooperation with the Committee in relation to Tokelau was a model in that regard.

16. The Special Committee's mission to Tokelau in 2002 had been its first in eight years. It had been important as the start of a more active phase in the Committee's work and had been judged a success. However, the Special Committee could feel no sense of accomplishment unless its main recommendation — a study to determine the implications of Tokelau's options for self-determination — was actually implemented. The Special Committee should be given appropriate resources to do so in 2003. Similar studies were needed to provide a starting point for decolonization for most of the Non-Self Governing Territories, and the proposed working groups should consider them when developing their work programmes.

17. The Special Committee needed strong backing from the United Nations structure as a whole: studies long ago approved by the General Assembly should not be left unaccomplished for lack of expertise. Without the information they provided, the peoples of Non-Self Governing Territories would not be aware of their options, and the Member States would not be abreast of political and constitutional developments. The regional commissions, specialized agencies and other bodies should continue to help the peoples of Non-Self Governing Territories so that they were well prepared for self-government. The decolonization mandate would be helped by more collaboration between the Third and Fourth Committees of the General Assembly, the Special Committee and the Human Rights Committee, and the Territories should be included in the programmes of action of the Durban Declaration, the World Summit on Sustainable Development and other world conferences of the United Nations.

Organization of work (A/AC.109/2003/L.1 and A/AC.109/2003/L.2)

18. **The Chairman** drew attention to documents A/AC.109/2003/L.1 and A/AC.109/2003/L.2 on the organization of work, which emphasized that early conclusion would enable the Secretariat to make all Special Committee documents available to the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Special Committee approved the proposed organization of work for the current session.

19. *It was so decided.*

Other matters

20. **The Chairman** said that, as in previous years, the Special Committee would strictly apply the decision of the General Assembly whereby meetings would be convened without the presence of the quorum required under rules 67 and 108 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. However, the presence of a majority of the members would be required for any decision to be taken.

21. Informal meetings of the Special Committee would be convened for the specific purpose of organizing its next regional seminar, which would take place in the Caribbean. Discussions were planned with the United Kingdom, the administering Power for most of the remaining Non-Self Governing Territories in the region, with a view to holding the seminar in Anguilla. That would not just further the work of the Special Committee, it would increase awareness of it in those Territories.

22. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Special Committee authorized him to hold consultations with the regional groups, either directly or through the officers of the Special Committee, in order to organize the seminar.

23. *It was so decided.*

24. **Mr. Lewis** (Antigua and Barbuda), speaking on behalf of Antigua and Barbuda and Grenada, said that the Special Committee had long been in the forefront of developing measures to enable the Non-Self Governing Territories to achieve absolute political equality in line with the three available options of independence, free association and integration, with full political rights; its activities even predated the two International Decades for the Eradication of Colonialism. However, those directives were only as good as their implementation.

25. One of the most important of those measures was providing political education to make the populations of the Non-Self Governing Territories aware of the options available to them, and of the effects of their choices. They needed to be aware of the ramifications of continued political dependence, which globalization had made more pronounced in a number of Territories. The Special Committee should make sure that its work at Headquarters was well enough understood by the population of those Territories, which was often misinformed about the relevance of the Special Committee and the United Nations in general to the Territories' development.

26. The Special Committee continued to have less than adequate knowledge and analysis of the changing situation on the ground in the Non-Self Governing Territories. The Sub-Committee on Small Territories had performed that research and analysis function until it had been disbanded over 10 years previously, and it had no successor. To help to address the information gap, the delegation of Antigua and Barbuda would organize a briefing session on the political, socio-economic and constitutional developments in the Caribbean Territories by an expert from the region in April 2003.

27. Antigua and Barbuda and Grenada would continue to support the work of the Special Committee in advancing the progress towards self-government of all the remaining Non-Self Governing Territories, especially the small island, developing countries of the Caribbean and the Pacific.

28. **Ms. Mulamula** (United Republic of Tanzania) called for copies of the opening statements of the Secretary-General and the Chairman to be made available to the members of the Special Committee, and for their message to be communicated to the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement at their forthcoming summit in Kuala Lumpur as a way to mobilize the support of that Movement.

29. **Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoué** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that he welcomed the support of the Secretary-General for the work of the Special Committee, and drew attention to the appeal for fruitful cooperation between the Special Committee and administering Powers. He also drew attention to the contribution made by Fiji to the work of the Special Committee, and communicated his thanks to that country's Ambassador, who was leaving New York.

30. **Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla** (Cuba) said Cuba fully supported the work of the Special Committee, and saw the presence of the Secretary-General at the current meeting as reaffirming the role of the United Nations in decolonization, a chapter of unfinished business for the Organization. The Special Committee had much work to do in the coming year in implementing its plans. Its proposed Caribbean regional seminar was particularly important to the countries of the Caribbean and Latin America. The draft Final Document for the forthcoming Kuala Lumpur summit reaffirmed the

foundations of the Non-Aligned Movement, which included decolonization, providing an opportunity to widen discussion of the issue.

31. **Mr. Blanco** (Venezuela) said that the work of the Special Committee in promoting the right to self-determination was deservedly recognized by the international community. Venezuela offered its full support in carrying out the full programme of work for the year, and welcomed the preparation of a Caribbean regional summit as a means to advance the aims of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. The challenge before the Special Committee was to overcome the obstacles of the past, and pave the way for complete decolonization, thus turning an aspiration into a reality.

32. **Mr. Yauvoli** (Fiji) thanked the members of the Special Committee for their expressions of thanks to the outgoing Ambassador and assured them of Fiji's full support in fulfilling the Special Committee's mandate.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.